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ABSTRACT

Written for anyone interested in what makes a meeting run smoothly (and what doesn't), the guide for conducting meetings is divided into the following sections: the chairperson (his/her responsibilities, preparing an agenda, organizing discussions); the meeting (quorums, discussions, points of order, and clarification); the motion (making the motion, discussing it, amending it, voting on it, adjourning, different kinds of votes); the order of business (minutes, committee reports, unfinished business, nominations and elections, new business). In addition, the guide contains a section on taking minutes. Emphasizing that the more informed the member of a group, the more productive the meeting, the guide attempts to relate the elements of a meeting in such a way that every member of the group has an opportunity to be informed. (AH)

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CONDUCTING MEETINGS

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GUIDE FOR CONDUCTING MEETINGS

This is a guide for conducting meetings. It is written for anyone interested in what makes a meeting run smoothly--and what doesn't. The guide is divided into the following sections:

THE CHAIRPERSON: his/her responsibilities; preparing an agenda; organizing discussions

THE MEETING: quorums; discussions; points of order and clarification

THE MOTION: making the motion, discussing it, amending it, voting on it, adjourning, different kinds of votes

THE ORDER OF BUSINESS: minutes; committee reports; unfinished business; nominations and elections; new business

There is also a section on taking minutes. One key element runs through this guide: The more informed the member of a group, the more productive the meeting. This guide attempts to relate the elements of a meeting in such a way so that every member of your group has an opportunity to be informed.

THE CHAIRPERSON

1. **Know what will happen and prepare for it.**
   The Chairperson should not be surprised. She/He should have a good idea of what is going to happen at the meeting.

   Some ways to plan:
   a) contact key people to ask if they have any issues to discuss;
   b) be aware of community activities which might affect the members of the group; and
   c) monitor committees to anticipate what their reports will be.

   The Chairperson should devise an agenda based on the previous information gathered. This agenda should follow a standard order of business. (see THE ORDER OF BUSINESS), and should incorporate specific topics planned for discussion at each meeting. The Chairperson should also allot blocks of time for each topic or groups of topic (e.g., committee reports).
   In general, the more structured the agenda, the more smoothly the meeting will run.

2. **Stick to the agenda.**
   The Chairperson should communicate the agenda to the group at the outset of the meeting. In fact, many Chairpersons distribute the proposed agenda to Parent Committee members several days before the meeting. Members of the group can then get an idea of what will occur during the meeting, when it will occur, and (in some cases) who will be leading the discussions. The group can suggest changes in the agenda, e.g., adding or deleting topics, or alloting different amounts of time for topics. The optimum is to find the right mixture of speed and thoroughness. Too often people skirt over issues they'd like to discuss because the meeting has gone on too long. Once the group accepts the agenda, it is the Chairperson's responsibility to stick to it. During the course of the year, groups become more adept in planning meetings.

3. **Make things informal; check on people's comfort.**
   The Chairperson is responsible for the meeting as a whole. She/He should do her/his best to assure that people are comfortable--the temperature of the room is satisfactory, smoke isn't bothering anyone, lighting is sufficient. The Chairperson should also develop an atmosphere of friendliness and informality so that all participants at the meeting--members of the group or not--feel welcome to make comments and observe the proceedings. If there are guests, the Chairperson may explain the group's operating procedures, e.g., who can vote.

4. **Keep order; speak loudly; organize discussions.**
The Chairperson should try to maintain control over the meeting in an effective but overbearing way. She/He should speak loudly enough so that everyone can hear, and should speak authoritatively enough so that everyone will listen. It is the Chairperson's responsibility to limit discussions to the issue at hand. Sometimes it's necessary to organize discussion so that people do stick to the issue. Some ways to organize discussions:
a) set time limits for discussion;
b) alternate speakers on one side of an issue with speakers on another;
c) break down the issue into smaller parts, and discuss one part at a time; and
d) use visual aids to make the discussion clearer.

5. **Vote only when it makes a difference.**
The Chairperson is a facilitator, a person who maintains an objective control of the discussions and is able to render fair judgements. The Chairperson should not use her/his role to influence the discussion or vote. She/He should not compromise the role of objective facilitator by voting when it doesn't make a difference in the outcome. Times when a Chairperson should vote:
a) when the Chairperson's vote breaks a tie; and
b) when the Chairperson's vote causes a tie, defeating the motion. For example, if the motion were to authorize children to go on a field trip, and the vote came out 7 in favor of the field trip and 6 opposed to the field trip, then the Chairperson could vote against the field trip. The vote would then be 7 to 7, and the motion to authorize children to go on the field trip would be defeated.

6. **Be patient and fair.**
It can be trying to be an effective Chairperson. The Chairperson should keep in mind that everyone is different. Some people enjoy "taking the floor" and speaking their mind in front of a group; other have little liking or experience for public speaking. Some people desire a free-flow discussion to generate ideas; others require the formal rules to structure debate. Some people feel comfortable with emotion forms of expression on certain issues; other prefer to limit the discussion to facts. The Chairperson must allow for as many different expressions as possible. She/He must sometimes put aside his/her own attitudes and let others have their say. And she/he must be patient with who aren't as familiar with the procedures of the meeting or the issue at hand. An effective Chairperson will encourage, or "entertain" motions or comments, so that everyone feels welcome to participate.

THE MEETING

1. **A quorum is necessary.**
A quorum is an established number of people who must be present before an **official** meeting can take place. Often a quorum is half-plus-one of the total members. For example, if a Parent Committee has twenty members, then eleven (half-plus-one) must be present for a meeting to take place.

A quorum is a standard function used by most official bodies. It is used to prevent a small minority from conducting official business--voting on key issues, electing officers, approving expenditures--without a represenative showing of the members of the group.

2. **Everyone is free to discuss.**
Within the limits, everyone is free to discuss at a meeting. Some of those limits may be:
a) the person should not speak on an issue until its time on the agenda;
b) the person should not speak on an issue when she/he has already voiced an opinion and others have yet to speak;
c) the person should not speak on an issue until she/he has been recognized by the Chairperson; and
d) the person should not speak on an issue after the group has agreed to end the discussion.

An effective Chairperson will see that everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to speak. Given an orderly, efficient meeting, everyone should have an opportunity to offer an opinion on the issue being discussed.

THE MOTION

1. **Making the motion.**
   Only voting members may make a motion. A motion should be stated clearly and if necessary repeated for the benefit of the group as well as at the (Recording) Secretary. An example of a motion is: "I move that we approve the Title IV proposal as presented to us by the Coordinator."

2. **Discussing/Amending a motion.**
   Some groups prefer to have the motion **seconded** before discussing it; others see no need for seconding the motion. If a second is used at all, it should be used before discussion of the motion. Discussion should center around only the motion on the floor, and the Chairperson should keep it from straying into other areas. In some cases, a time limit may be established for discussion of the motion. If someone wants to make a change in the original motion, then an amendment can be made during the discussion. If the original motion was "I move that we approve the Title IV proposal as presented to us by the Coordinator," then the amendment to that motion might be "I would like to amend that we approve only the financial section of the proposal now, and postpone approving the entire proposal until we get more information."

3. **Voting on the motion.**
   Discussion on the motion ends when someone "calls for the question" or it is agreed that the time for discussion has expired. If there is an amendment on the floor, then the amendment is voted on first. The Secretary or the Chairperson reads the amendment to the motion, and the group votes. Following that vote, the group can continue to discuss the original motion (if appropriate, as amended). Then the original motion (with approved amendments) is repeated to the group, and the group votes again. Once the motion has been voted on, the group can proceed to the next item on the agenda. All the participants should be made aware (by the Secretary or Chairperson) of the results of any vote.

4. **The motion to adjourn.**
   The motion to adjourn should not be discussed or amended. The Chairperson can rule the motion out of order (for example, if items on the agenda have yet to be covered). But, if the motion is proper, then the group votes without discussion. The meeting is either adjourned or continues until the group decides to vote for adjournment.

THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. **Presentation of minutes.**
   The presentation of minutes of the previous meeting is usually the first order of business. The Secretary reads what happened at the previous meeting. Then the group either accepts the minutes, rejects them, or accepts them as changed. Changes usually result from misspelled names, inaccurate dates, etc.. There is no discussion of the issues of the previous meeting, only discussion of the issues of the accuracy of the minutes. It is helpful to distribute copies of the minutes before the meeting starts.

2. **Reports of officers, boards, and standing committees.**
   Following action on the minutes, standard reports are read. These might include reports from the Treasurer, from the Project Director, or from the Superintendent. A standing committee is one which is permanent, and continuous, not one which is set up to meet a temporary objective, or to solve a particular issue. Reports from standing committees should be made before reports from special committees; copies of such reports can also be distributed to the group before the meeting starts.

3. **Reports of special committees.**
   A special committee is sometimes called an **ad hoc** committee. Ad hoc means, literally, "toward this thing." An ad hoc committee is set up for a specific purpose; ad hoc committees might be a Needs Assessment Committee, a Potluck Committee, or a Field Trip Committee. Reports from these committees are quite likely to be more extensive than reports from standing committees, and time should be planned accordingly.

4. **Unfinished business.**
All unfinished ("old") business should be taken care of before new business begins. That is the key to the smooth operation of any meeting. Take care of the left-over issues first; if you don't, then things will just pile up. Unfinished business might be discussion tabled (postponed) from the previous meeting, reports from individuals on assigned tasks, summaries of activities having already taken place, or presentation of guest speakers.

5. **Nominations and elections.**
If nominations and/or elections are scheduled, then they should follow the completion of any unfinished business, because they are, in a sense, unfinished business. Obviously, nominations and elections usually take quite a bit of time, so the Chairperson may want to plan additional time (or even a special meeting) for them.

6. **New Business.**
New business should be discussed only after old business is dispensed with. New business may be issues that have never been brought up before. They may be discussed, or the Chairperson may assign a committee to look into the issues further, and report at a later meeting.

TAKING MINUTES

The minutes of a meeting should consist of at least the following:
1. date, place, and time of the meeting;
2. names of people present; and
3. motions/decisions made.

The minutes may also include any and all of the following:
1. names of members absent;
2. Treasurer's report;
3. committee reports;
4. all business undertaken--discussions, etc.; and
5. tallies of votes.

Minutes may become easier to take with the following hints:
1. Listen for key words.
2. Try to capture basic ideas; don't write down every word.
3. Include only pertinent comments.
4. Abbreviate words.
5. Circle key ideas, statements, or decisions.
6. Ask members to repeat things if you can't keep up (e.g., in motions).

from How to Make Meetings Work, Doyle and Strauss, 1976

All you are really doing when you take minutes is recording what actually happened, so that you don't have to rely on someone's memory. Because of this, it is especially important to record what was voted on. For example, if your Parent Committee voted to have potluck next Thursday, it's essential that you you take that down. If your group voted it **down**, that is, if it was proposed and rejected that you hold a potluck, it's a good idea to take that down as well. As you get more experience in taking minutes, you can record more and more items.

After you take the minutes of a meeting, you will probably have a jumble of phrases and words and possible numbers. **Don't wait to transcribe** the jumble. You'll most likely forget what your symbols mean and to what your phrases refer. Spend some time rewriting your minutes in their final form. You'll save yourself embarrassment when you're called to read the minutes from the previous meeting.

One additional comment: it's a good idea to use the same form each time you take the minutes. If you list the members present at the top of the page one time, do it every time. If you use short paragraphs one time, use them every time. It will be easier for you to record them, and for others to read them. The original transcript of the minutes of a meeting, with any changes made, should be kept on file in a safe place.

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING A MEETING

There are eight steps that the Chairperson should follow in holding a meeting:

1. Call the meeting to order.
2. Hear the minutes of the previous meeting.
3. Hear reports of officers, boards, and standing committees.
4. Hear reports of special committees.
5. Hear announcements.
6. Go on with the unfinished business of the last meeting.
7. Go on to the new business.
8. End the meeting and adjourn.

TO CONDUCT A PARENT COMMITTEE MEETING

CONDUCTING MEETING

The Parent Committee has the responsibility to make certain decisions regarding the funded program they serve. If this is to occur in practice then it is essential that the members of the committee and especially the leaders of the group, develop the ability to run meetings in an orderly fashion which will ensure that differing points of view can be aired and that business is completed according to schedule. While any number of methods could be devised to achieve this, the outline given below sketches the most common format for conducting meetings.

CALL TO ORDER

a) Roll Call
b) Determination if quorum is present

READING OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

a) Name of the group which met
b) Kind of meeting, e.g., regular or special
c) Place, time, and date of meeting
d) Presiding officer
e) Approval of minutes of prior meeting
f) Motions made, by whom, and final action on them
g) Time of adjournment

REPORTS FROM OFFICERS AND REGULAR COMMITTEES

a) Statement of issue, problems, item of business, etc.
b) Method of dealing with it
c) Recommendations for action
d) Action by group

REPORTS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OLD BUSINESS, CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

NEW BUSINESS

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIRPERSON'S CHECKLIST FOR MEETINGS

1. **ROOM ARRANGEMENTS**
   a) Have arrangements been made for a meeting room?
   b) Will the room be comfortable?
   c) Are there enough chairs?
   d) Have arrangements been made for special equipment if needed?
   e) If there are handouts, are there enough for everybody?
   f) Will notices be send out in time for people who plan to attend?
   g) If needed, is there a telephone committee ready to remind members of the meeting?

2. **PROGRAM ARRANGEMENTS**

   a) Has the agenda been prepared and mailed to members?
   b) Have speakers been invited to participate?
   c) Does the speaker have the time, place, room number, for the meeting?
   d) Does he or she know how long to talk and how large the group will be?

3. **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

   a) Have refreshments been planned?
   b) Have arrangements for babysitting been made?

4. **THE DAY OF THE MEETING**

   a) Do you plan to arrive early to doublecheck the room, equipment, chairs, and refreshments?
   b) Are there signs to direct people to the meeting room?
   c) Have you made arrangements for someone to meet and greet the speaker?
   d) Will someone greet people when they arrive? Are there nametags?
   e) Will you have extra copies of the agenda available?

5. **AFTER THE MEETING**

   a) Will you be available to talk with members? Some hesitate to speak at meetings and have ideas you will want to consider.
   b) Will you thank the speaker? A written note is effective.
   c) Have you tidied up the room as much as possible?
   d) Will you make arrangements to return any equipment?